



## Reef Care 2007 is underway!

The fourteenth Aruba Reef Care Project has begun with a poster and slogan competition for the island's schoolchildren. Castro Perez of the Aruba Tourism Authority, who has been organizing the clean-up campaign since its inception was joined by colleague Nathalie Maduro at ATA headquarters in announcing this year's project, which will take place on Saturday and Sunday, July 7 and 8.

The Aruba Reef Care Project started out with divers and snorkelers cleaning underwater at various dive sites and around the piers, removing the remarkable amount of debris that was either thrown or had blown into the sea after some time. The first year, massive amounts of entangled fishing line, bottles, and other refuse was collected and disposed of, and since then most of the dive sites have been fairly well maintained. Over the years the project has expanded to include the beaches from Baby Beach in the East to Palm Beach and the North Coast, and volunteers consisting of entire schools, business groups and tourists have swelled the ranks of those combing the beaches and hauling away the garbage that accumulates from one year to the next. A great deal of this, particularly along the north coast, is from ships dumping at sea, and then brought to shore by the currents.

Dive operations such as Unique Sports of Aruba and SEA Fly and Dive still find substantial amounts of plastic cups and similar debris under the water, which are very harmful to sea life, particularly turtles. Castro Perez stated that this year the Reef Care Project is also working with TortugAruba to emphasize how deadly floating plastic goods are to endangered species of turtles that mistake them for their favorite food, jellyfish, and then choke on them when they try to eat the plastic. He reminds individuals to dispose of their plastic and Styrofoam containers properly, and remedy this problem.

For the competition for local schoolchildren, the ATA has received the sponsorship of Meta Corporation, and winners of the poster and slogan contest will win tickets to the Seaport Cinemas for their entire class. The purpose of the contest is to educate and promote among Aruba's youth more a more conscientious attitude and appreciation for protecting the island's environment. Entries will be made through the schools, and the deadline to qualify is May 3. The entries should be of poster size and the subject matter Aruba's underwater environment, depicted in any materials the artist cares to employ.

Once the new slogan and poster are introduced, the inscription to participate in the Reef Care Project will begin.